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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Excessive Alcohol Use in Eau Claire County

High Costs – Serious Health Consequences

Eau Claire, WI – March 13, 2013–The first-ever comprehensive report detailing the costs of excessive alcohol use in Wisconsin was just released by Health First Wisconsin. The Burden of Excessive Alcohol Use in Wisconsin report estimates that excessive alcohol use costs \$6.8 billion a year in Wisconsin or approximately \$1,200 a person. In Eau Claire County, the cost is \$160 million a year.

Excessive alcohol use is a long-term problem in Eau Claire County and throughout the State, evolving over many years. Excessive alcohol consumption includes:

- Binge drinking (5+ drinks per occasion for men; 4+ drinks for women)
- Heavy drinking (2+ drinks per day for men; 1+ for women)
- Underage drinking (any alcohol consumption by youth under age 21) and
- Any alcohol consumption by pregnant women.

Over the past decade, excessive alcohol use has been recognized as a serious public health issue. Since 2000, Wisconsin has experienced among the highest rates in the nation of binge, heavy, and underage drinking as well as drinking before driving. Excessive and dangerous drinking behaviors have led to staggering high costs, placing a tremendous burden on our businesses, health care, law enforcement and the criminal justice system. A huge toll is also taken on communities in terms of our health and public safety.

In 2003, the Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention (a coalition of coalitions) began efforts to tackle the problem in Eau Claire County. The Reality Check 21 Partnership was formed to reduce underage drinking among Eau Claire County youth 12-17 years old. The UW Eau Claire Center for Alcohol Studies initiated programs to reduce high-risk drinking among college students.

In 2001, the rate of alcohol use among high school students was 71%. Today, it's 51%. This reduction is attributable to making alcohol less available and underage drinking less acceptable.

Parents, schools, law enforcement and other community partners have been working collaboratively on a variety of research-based strategies.

Wisconsin's environment has become too accepting of alcohol misuse.

Eau Claire County has a higher rate of binge drinking (30%) than Wisconsin (23%) or the US (16%),

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“There’s not a week that goes by where we don’t hear about an alcohol-related tragedy,” stated Francie Peardon, Community Advocacy Director of the Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention in Eau Claire County. “This report gives us the data on how pervasive alcohol problems are – those we hear about and those we don’t. If our community works together, we can prevent these tragedies.”